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SOPHIE'S CHOICE: A TRANSPERSONAL EXPERIMENT

by Andrea Berger

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When I was interrogated in Communist Romania, after my mother and sister defected the country, I took the approach of being cheerful and smiling and shining my light brightly. That totally befuddled and annoyed the interrogators, as it took them out of their normal mode of operation. Most "victims" were crying or exuded fear. I don't think they ever had somebody come in smiling and happy and self-assured.

I had been waiting all day with no food/water for my turn to come, and all the people coming out were in tears. So, granted, I had time to formulate a plan. My plan was to be joyful and loving. They didn't know how to react to this, as I was not impertinent, so they couldn't really say anything about my behavior.

I felt the presence of my guides very strongly in the room around me, which helped me throughout the ordeal (luckily, I wasn't tortured physically, as I'm not sure how I would have reacted then).

When I read Donald Paulus's blog on the Monroe Institute website, "Psychopomp Work at Holocaust Sites," it reminded me of an assignment in my "Inner Life: Dreams, Meditation,

Creativity, and Imagination" class at Atlantic University, as part of my Master's program in Transpersonal Studies. We had to "enter" an image (movie, painting, photograph or other artwork) and meditate on it, as part of an experiment in visualization and imagery.

Experiment #3:

In this experiment, I wanted to explore a dark image that occasionally haunts me. It is from the movie “Sophie’s Choice” with Meryl Streep, set in Nazi Poland during WWII. Sophie is a political prisoner with two young children. As she arrives at Auschwitz, a young Nazi officer forces her to choose life for one child and death for the other. Her plea of “Don’t make me choose. I can’t choose” is ignored and when the Nazi threatens to send both her children to die, she releases her daughter, shouting “Take my little girl,” then watches full of guilt and despair as the screaming little girl is taken by the Nazis to die in the gas chamber.

I also have two children, one boy, and a younger daughter, so I can only imagine the horrific choice she had to make. For years, I occasionally asked myself what I would have done faced with the same situation. So, I enter the image, merging my awareness with Sophie’s, though part of me is still the observer. I have a hard time staying with the image, especially once the Nazi officer comes in sight at the train station shouting at her, so I leave and re-enter the image over and over. Even though I know it’s not real, it becomes so overwhelming that I am pulled away from the scene. Flashes of memories from my own past in Communist Romania come to the foreground and I remember how I reacted during those difficult times when I was being interrogated.

As I asked within for help, I felt my guides around me and something inside clicked … and the fear suddenly dissipated, like fog in the sunshine. I felt so powerful … and I suddenly knew what to say and do … and time and space stood still and felt plastic, malleable … and I knew that I could mentally control the outcome of the situation. I will not give away my power! This is the lesson to be learned in this situation.

> *So, when I return to Sophie my fear is gone and I am determined to go through it this time. I am so much more than my physical body and my body is all that the Nazis can destroy. I have to be careful with the children. I make a mental link with the Nazi officer. He is young, he is afraid but too proud to admit it. He hates to choose who will live and who will die, so he asks the people to choose. It’s all such a nightmare. He wonders, “why doesn’t it stop? Where is God?” He is angry and his heart is covered in layers and layers of bitterness, fear, anger and pain. He drinks every night with the other officers to cover it up, so he is in a state of dull stupor.*
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> *It is easy for me to reach his mind and bend it to mine like Obi-Wan Kenobi did in Star Wars. As he barks at me to make the choice, I lock his eyes into mine and tell him quietly, gently, but firmly: “Now listen to me, just listen! My name is Sophie, and these are*

my children, Jan and Eve. What is your name?" "Hans," he replies befuddled. "Do you have a family, Hans? Remember your mother. What would she do? Would she choose between you and your other siblings if she had to make a choice? Whom would she choose? I will not choose and you know it." "Now, tell the other officers that everything is in order and listen to me carefully. You must help us!" He tells me that he wishes he could help me, but it is not possible. All children under 8 are sent to the gas chamber, no exceptions, and Eve is only 4.

Suddenly, I know what I must do and I am at peace with it, so I make Hans promise to watch over my son and to send me and Eve to the gas chambers, as I can't let her die alone in fear. He nods and takes Jan away, but not before I tell Jan (who is 12) that I love him, that he must live for all of us, and that we will be always together, even if only in spirit … that I need to take care of Eve, but I and all our ancestors and guides will be watching over him … he will not be alone … he must be brave and he will be all right!

As I walk with Eve into the gas chamber, I hold her eyes fixed on mine and I smile and sing to her and ask others to join me in song. I create a wall of supporting energy around us and gradually the fear and the pain in our group are replaced by hope. We are not defeated, we die with dignity, we are not afraid. Only a little bit longer and we are free! As the chamber fills with smoke, I see the hope in people's eyes as they continue to sing, and everything becomes engulfed in brilliant white light ... and so much love!

This experiment was very emotional for me, as it drew me deep into the imaginal story. It felt so real as if I really died in that gas chamber with Eve. I was very relieved to find an acceptable alternate ending to the story, one that I can be at peace with, and at the same time realistic and creative. I can easily see myself reacting that way in real life. Learning not to give away my power to others is a very important lesson that I practiced (and perhaps need to continue to practice) in this life.

I was amazed by the power of identifying with and learning to appreciate the enemy (the Nazi officer), as it allowed me to change my fear and anger towards him into compassion and hope, thereby transforming him into my accomplice and ultimately, helper.